

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

"They do not comprehend the connection" with slavery

A Letter from Charles Francis Adams to Charles Francis Adams Jr.

London, June 21, 1861

With respect to his [Sumner's] language about Governor Seward I very much regret it for the sake of the public interest. He is sowing the seeds of discord where we ought to have a more perfect union. He is disseminating distrust in our Government when it depends on confidence. I am surprised to find how very general the dislike of the Governor is in society here. The English express fear of his intentions towards them and intimate suspicions of his duplicity, whilst among Americans he finds only here and there a defender. . . .

People do not quite understand Americans or their politics. They think this a hasty quarrel, the mere result of a passion, which will be arranged as soon as the cause of it shall pass off. They do not comprehend the connection which slavery has with it, because we do not at once preach emancipation. Hence they go to the other extreme and argue that it is not an element of the struggle. With the commercial men the wish is father to the thought. They look with some uneasiness to the conditions of the operatives at Manchester, to the downfall of Southern State stocks, to the falling off of the exports of goods and the drain of specie, to the exclusion from the seaports by the blockade, and to the bad debts of their former customers, for all which their sole panacea is settlement, somehow, or not matter how. It is a recognition of two governments, that is as good a way as any other. On the other hand I now look to something of a war. We are in it and cannot get out. The slaveholding politicians must go down or there will be no permanent peace. I confess that in this sense I look with some anxiety to the meeting of Congress. I know not who there is now to give a right tone to its proceedings. Possibly some of the new men may come in and contribute to help on the work. . . .

Source

Ford, Worthington Chauncey, ed. *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865*, in two volumes. [Boston: 1920]